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V CORPS ENGINEERS BUILDING, MOVING BRIDGES DURING SECOND IRAQ DEPLOYMENT

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HANAU, Germany – Wherever they go, building bridges, berms and bunkers is all in a day's work for members of V Corps' 502nd Engineer Company.



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Soldiers of V Corps' 502nd Engineer Company, 130th Engineer Brigade from Hanau, Germany maneuver boats to a bridge spanning the Tigris River in Tikrit, Iraq. The engineers moved a section of the bridge and transported it further downstream for security purposes. After taking it apart the Soldiers moved it to another location in Iraq. Members of the 502nd Engineers deployed to Iraq from Hanau in September and are expected to remain through fall.

The unit, based here as part of the 565th Engineer Battalion, 130th Engineer Brigade, has been deployed to Iraq since September. In Iraq the company joined the 420th Engineer Group, the theater-level engineer group.

The company's former commander, Capt. Joshua Stringer, recently returned to Hanau to take up a new position as the battalion's operations officer, handing off command of the 502nd to Capt. Andrew Park January 14 in Iraq.

Stringer shared his experiences and described the activities of his former unit in Iraq during their second deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"Company command grows on you; it's a great job to have. I miss being with the unit, but maybe I don't miss being in Iraq," said Stringer.

"We convoyed into Iraq on Oct. 9 and initially went to Tallil, an air base which is about three hours into the country in southern Iraq. We were there about a week and then we received orders to move to Logistical Support Area Anaconda (in Balad)," said Stringer. "Within 72 hours of being in Anaconda we got a mission to take out a bridge in Tikrit. There, we relocated a 336-meter-long Mabey-Johnson bridge over the Tigris River.

We removed it, broke it down and transported it to the Marines' Alpha 8th Engineer Support Battalion at As-Sindayah, near LSA Anaconda. It took five or six large movements to move the entire bridge.

"I guess the bridge wasn't supporting a military operation any longer and was needed elsewhere. It took 16 days to actually remove and deliver the bridge, but a total of 30 days because we had to build a temporary work site," he said. "We did a lot there; working at the edge of a farmer's field.

"We used an interpreter to coordinate our operations with the farmer," Stringer said.

"It took about five days of preparations until we could work there safely. We had to build 10 fighting positions and 400 meters of berm. We also dug some bunkers in case we got attacked."

The company was attacked every few days, with one mortar landing within a few hundred yards of the work site. Attacks usually consisted of just a few mortars being fired before the attackers would flee, he said.

The unit lived on Forward Operating Base Danger, about a 15-minute commute to the work site in Tikrit each morning. Security at the site was required 24 hours a day.

The company's next mission was in Al-Qaim, about 12 miles from the Syrian border in the far northwest corner of Iraq. The assignment, in support of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, required the company to make about a 10-hour movement.

The 502nd troops removed a 240-meter-long assault float bridge from over the Euphrates River at Al-Qaim.

"We removed the bridge and returned it to the theater bridge park at LSA Anaconda. One of our major duties in Iraq was to manage, maintain, organize and inventory the bridge park," said Stringer. A bridge park is where the theater engineer group stores and maintains its bridging assets for future use — essentially a large storage and maintenance facility.

"We had the bridge out in about four-and-a-half hours, but it was a five-day mission to drive there, do the work and return," said Stringer.

In January the company also erected a 12-bay Mabey-Johnson logistic support bridge over the Tigris River at Mussayibe, south of Baghdad.

The bridge was installed over the top of an existing Iraqi bridge which had been damaged by a car bomb.

"I think they were trying to take out the bridge," said Stringer. "The explosion was right in the middle of the bridge and there were pieces of the car everywhere."

Quality of life for the Hanau engineers in Iraq is improving every day, the former company commander said.

"The day I left, we moved out of tents and into billets," said Stringer.

But it's not all work for the engineers in Iraq. Some have found time to take in the sights.

"When we were in Tallil, some of the Soldiers were able to see Abraham's birthplace. It was actually on post," said Stringer. "There were remnants of homes sunken in the ground and a three-story-tall pyramid monument, I think built by Saddam Hussein."

Other Soldiers visited Ur, one of the most ancient towns in the world, dating back to

3000 B.C. The 19-meter-high ziggurat which stands there was built during the 3rd Dynasty, circa 2000 B.C., when Ur expanded from a city-state to rule a vast empire which included parts of Asia Minor, the Arabian Gulf Coast, Elam and the Near East. Ziggurats are thought to have been forerunners of the Egyptian pyramids — stepped buildings made of mud brick. Much of this ziggurat was restored in the 1960s.

